

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Thomas Methodist Episcopal Chapel
other names/site number Thomas Chapel, Thomas Chapel United Methodist Church, VDHR 009-0178

2. Location

street & number State Route 684 Penicks Mill Road not for publication N/A
city or town Thaxton vicinity X
state Virginia code VA county Bedford code 019 Zip 24450

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined eligible for the
National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Thomas Methodist Episcopal Chapel
Bedford County, VA

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

_____ Greek Revival _____

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

roof metal

walls brick

other wood

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Religion

Architecture

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Thomas Methodist Episcopal Chapel
Bedford County, VA

Period of Significance 1844-1954

Significant Dates 1844

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation n/a

Architect/Builder unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

 previously listed in the National Register

 previously determined eligible by the National Register

 designated a National Historic Landmark

 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #

 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

 X State Historic Preservation Office

 Other State agency

 Federal agency

 Local government

 University

 Other

Name of repository: VA Department of Historic Resources

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.419 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing

1 17 621546 4137758

3

 See continuation sheet.

Zone Easting Northing

2

4

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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National Park Service

Thomas Methodist Episcopal Chapel
Bedford County, VA

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Michael J. Pulice, Architectural Historian

Organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Roanoke Region date February, 2004

street & number: 1030 Penmar Ave SE telephone 540-857-7586

city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24013

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Bedford Historical Society, Inc. contact: Betty Lambeth Gereau

street & number 448 Anchor Drive telephone 540-721-8507

city or town Moneta state VA zip code 24121

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Thomas Methodist Episcopal Chapel
Bedford Co. Virginia**

Continuation Sheet

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Summary Description

The Thomas Methodist Episcopal Chapel is a small, rectangular-plan, one-story, one-room, brick structure with a three-bay façade and a pedimented front gable roof. Constructed in 1844 by local craftsmen, the chapel was designed in a vernacular Greek Revival style. It is prominently situated at the top of a small, rounded, hill on the west side of Route 684, in the Penicks Mill area of rural Bedford County, Virginia.

Narrative Description

The chapel sits alone on the hilltop with no other associated buildings. It is rectangular in plan, measuring 30 feet by 40 feet. The three-bay front elevation faces north, and is highlighted by its large pediment with a recessed-panel tympanum and molded raking cornices. Below the pediment is a beaded friezeboard and a row of three clerestory windows (now boarded over), each of corresponding width, and in alignment with the door and flanking windows below. There are two symmetrically spaced windows on each side elevation, but none on the rear elevation. The 12-over-12 varnished wood sash with slender muntins can now only be seen from the interior. Above each opening are robust wood lintels with bullseye corner blocks. Each opening is also bordered by slender wood surrounds with miniature corner blocks in the top two corners. All lower level windows have louvered shutters that appear to be original. The single entrance is centered on the front elevation, enclosed by folding doors with five raised panels per leaf. With the exception of the doors and shutters, all exterior woodwork is painted white.

The church's structural system is composed of a foundation and walls of dark red, sand-molded, handmade brick, laid up in Flemish bond on the front elevation, and five-course American common bond on the sides and rear. The masonry joints are beaded and penciled, with the original mortar very much intact except for a few small, heavily weathered areas. The foundation is vented through holes in the masonry on each side of the building, spaced about one foot apart. Through the vents, the unhewn oak log floor joists and sash-sawn floorboards can be seen. The roof of the structure is covered with recently reconditioned, hand-crimped, standing seam, sheet metal.

The chapel interior has whitewashed plaster walls and ceiling and exposed tongue-and-groove pine floors. All of the furnishings in use when the church closed in 1972 are still in place, including pews, heating stove, piano, and white glass globe light fixtures that hang down from the ceiling. The pulpit, against the back wall, consists of a freestanding wood podium on an 8-

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by-10-foot raised platform with a thickly proportioned altar rail. Behind the altar area is a tapestry

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depicting Leonardo DaVinci's *Last Supper*.

The Thomas Chapel bears great similarity to the Bedford Historic Meeting House, the town of Bedford's first Methodist Church, erected in 1838. Its scale, design, materials, and construction are virtually identical. Unlike the Meeting House, which retains its side door and stair to the choir loft, the Thomas Chapel has had its original side door opening in-filled with bricks. The outline of the opening is clearly visible in the masonry on the west side elevation. According to tradition, slaves attended Methodist services along with their masters before the Civil War, but they sat separately, in the church loft. The loft is sure to have been terribly hot and stuffy during the summer months.

The Greek Revival style of Thomas Chapel, based on widely distributed pattern books such as those by Asher Benjamin, is consistent with the designs of other contemporary Protestant churches in the region, including those belonging to the Baptist, Episcopal and Presbyterian denominations. Besides the Bedford Meetinghouse, nearby examples include St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and the Bedford Presbyterian Church.

The associated cemetery site was located off of the Thomas Chapel grounds and is not included in the nominated parcel.

8. Statement of Significance

The Thomas M. E. Chapel, erected in 1844, is a rare surviving example of a formally designed, but minimally-scaled Greek-temple form church, established by prominent citizens in rural Bedford County to serve the local population. The chapel is rare because of its legacy, its age, its uncommonly small, simple plan, and perhaps most importantly, because it is essentially unaltered. The fact that no appendages, not even so much as a shed, have ever been added to the structure, places it in the ultra-rare category. The setting of the church is also remarkable. The impressive Peaks of Otter loom large above the small, partially wooded knoll on which the chapel sits. The view from the churchyard is exceptional. The Penicks area remains sparsely populated to this day, leaving the surrounding landscape unspoiled. In sum, the chapel's association with the distant past remains well intact. The chapel is also significant for its association with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which was effectively formed in the weeks preceding construction of the chapel, because of a bitter division within the Methodist Church over the issue of slavery.

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Justification of Criteria

The Thomas Chapel is eligible under Criterion A in the area of Religion because of its past association with the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is also eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture because of its quality of design and workmanship, rarity of form, and exceptionally unaltered condition. Its period of significance is 1844 to 1954.

Acknowledgements

The following individuals provided information or assistance in completing this nomination: Betty Lambeth Gereau at the Bedford Historical Society, Patti Russell at the Virginia Methodist Archives in Richmond, and Judee Showalter at Special Collections, McGraw-Page Library, Randolph Macon College, Ashland, Virginia, and Dr. John Kern at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Historical Background

Methodism originated in England in 1739, and was introduced in Bedford County in the late 18th century. Bishop Francis Asbury, founder of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, and principal leader of American Methodism until his death in 1816, preached in Bedford County during the summer of 1788, at the Bedford Courthouse in 1794, and there again in 1800. After his 1794 visit, Asbury wrote that a large population of Methodists lived in Bedford County, divided into thirteen societies, served by about ten local preachers. The first house of worship dedicated specifically to the

Methodist church in Bedford County was the Bedford Historic Meeting House, built in 1838, on Main Street in the county seat of Bedford, formerly known as Liberty. The growth of Methodism in Bedford County during the first half of the nineteenth century was reflected at the national level. By 1820 there were 259,000 Methodists in America. In 1840 there were 740,000.

By 1840 there were seventeen societies of Methodists on the Bedford circuit with a combined membership of 834, 728 white and 106 black. In 1850 there were 1,030 white and 204 black members. There were no "African churches" in Bedford County; all blacks were integrated into white congregations. They were either assigned to designated seats, or may have, in some cases, attended separate services. The Methodists fostered an extensive program of plantation missions for slaves. The Virginia Conference sponsored 3 clergymen who devoted their ministries to slaves in 1845, 6 in 1848 and 20 in 1860.¹

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The church had two main controversies in the first half of the nineteenth century, each of which resulted in division. The first division occurred in 1830 over the power of the bishops, resulting in the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church. The second division occurred in 1844 over the issue of slavery. The church had historically been ostensibly against slavery, but the issue became problematic when a high proportion of southern, slaveholding ministers attended the General Conference of 1844 in Baltimore, and the controversy culminated in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. On June 8th, 1844, a “plan of separation” was established. The conference adjourned on June 11, with the southern membership having withdrawn from the General Conference. They would have a new, separate ecclesiastical organization that outwardly rejected neither slavery nor the propriety of bishops to own slaves.²

Soon after the General Conference came to a close, Bedford County members of the Virginia Conference of the new Methodist Episcopal Church, South, began preparing to build a house of worship near the place now called Thaxton. In a signed indenture dated July 1st, 1844, Solomon and Lucinda Williamson gave the land on which the Thomas Chapel now sits to “James Jopling, Dr. Samuel Phillips, Alexander P. Price, William R. Jones, Robert C. Mitchell, Thomas W. Jones, Nathaniel Thaxton, and Edward D. Williams, trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church and to their successors forever in trust and upon condition that the said trustees and/ or their successors cause to be erected on said lot of ground a meeting house...” To seal the deal, the Williamsons accepted a token payment of five dollars. Construction of the chapel was soon underway.³

A reference to an 1844 Bedford Quarterly meeting appears in the Virginia Conference section in the Minutes of the Annual Conferences. It authorized a building committee to construct a new church “in the neighborhood of Solomon Williamson.” It was, of course, Williamson who donated the land for Thomas Chapel. The other churches or Sabbath schools in the county at the time, all referenced in the minutes, were Liberty, Nazareth, Smyrna, Olive Branch, Emmuas, Bethlehem and Providence. John Early was the presiding elder.⁴

In 1830, future Thomas Chapel co-founder James Jopling donated the land for Salem Church, near Peaksville, which was used by Methodists, Presbyterians, and possibly others. Dr. Samuel Phillips, a physician and local preacher who would soon help establish the Thomas Chapel, and Alexander P. Price, steward of the circuit and another future founding trustee of Thomas Chapel, were among the officials of the Bedford circuit as early as 1841.⁵ In 1840, Jopling had no slaves of his own, but within ten years he would own 26. He was a 42-year-old farmer in 1850, with real estate valued at \$2000. In 1840, Alexander Price owned 15 slaves. By 1850, Nathaniel Thaxton owned 10 slaves,

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Robert C. Mitchell owned 17 slaves and Thomas Jones owned 13 slaves. With the exception of Dr. Samuel **Section 8, Page 5**

Phillips, who owned no slaves, all of the trustees appear to have been farmers who eventually became slave owners.⁶ Phillips was one of the ministers assigned to plantation work by the Virginia Conference for several years in the 1840s.⁷

The Methodist Church did try to encourage slave owners to care for their slaves' well being and not to work them too hard or punish them excessively. Slave owners were also instructed to provide them spiritual instruction as well as access to the church and its rites.⁸

In 1851 the Bedford circuit was divided, creating the Staunton circuit, which included some societies in Bedford County. Thomas Chapel was among the Methodist societies that remained in the Bedford Circuit thereafter.⁹

In 1938 there was a reunification of the three main bodies of the Methodist Church: the Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Protestant, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.¹⁰

The Thomas Chapel was last occupied in 1972. Church membership had attenuated until it could no longer support the church. That same year, the Bedford Historical Society accepted responsibility for the chapel, and has raised enough money to cover basic maintenance costs ever since. Recent expenditures include preventative termite treatment and roof repairs. Both the Thomas Chapel and the Bedford Historic Meeting House are currently entrusted to the Bedford Historical Society.

Notes

1. Daniel, W. Harrison. *Bedford County, Virginia, 1840-1860*, 157.
2. Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, Abingdon Press, 1974, 189.
3. Bedford County Deed Book 35, page 90.
4. Minutes of the Annual Conferences, Virginia Conference section, Special Collections, McGraw-Page Library, Randolph Macon College, Ashland, Virginia.
5. Daniel, 160.
6. U.S. Census Manuscripts, Population; U.S. Census Manuscripts, Slave Population.
7. Daniel, 160.
8. Daniel, 160.
9. Daniel, 159.
10. Norwood, 191.

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Bibliography

Bedford County Deed Book 35, page 90.

Concise History of American History, New York: Charles Scribener's Sons, 1962.

Clark, Elmer T. *An Album of Methodist History*. Nashville: Abingon-Cokesville Press, 1952.

Daniel, W. Harrison. *Bedford County, Virginia, 1840-1860: The History of the Upper Piedmont in the Late Antebellum Era*. Privately printed, 1985.

Minutes of the Annual Conferences, Virginia Conference section, Special Collections, McGraw-Page Library, Randolph Macon College, Ashland, Virginia.

U.S. Census Manuscripts, Population
1840 Sixth Census, 1850 Seventh Census, Bedford County, Va.

U.S. Census Manuscripts, Slave Population
1850 Seventh Census, Bedford County, Va.

Norwood, Frederick A. *The Story of American Methodism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974.

Parker, Lula Jeter. *The History of Bedford County, Virginia*. Bedford, Va, 1954.

Virginia Landmarks Commission. Bedford Historic Meeting House, National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1977.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of Thomas Chapel is shown on the accompanying map entitled "Resurvey of 1.419 Acres, Thomas Chapel United Methodist Church," dated August 7, 2002. The parcel tax I.D. number is 90-A-25.

Boundary Justification

The nominated parcel boundary corresponds exactly to the historic Thomas Chapel property line.

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Photographs

All photographs are of:

Thomas Methodist Episcopal Chapel (DHR #009-0178)

Bedford County, Virginia

Date: October 2003

Photographer: Michael Pulice

Negative #: 21160

Location of negatives: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond

1. Northeast perspective of chapel exterior.
2. Southwest perspective of chapel exterior.
3. Entrance doors from chapel interior.
4. Pulpit, facing southwest.
5. Chapel interior, facing southwest (towards rear wall).
6. Representative chapel window, from interior.